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Pennsylvania Historical and
Museum Commission.
Graeme Park

PENNSYLVANIA TRAIL OF HISTORY



GRAEME PARK

A Historic Mansion Little
Changed from Colonial Times

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Graeme Park, lovely and picturesque in its rural setting, affords an insight into the life of an eighteenth-century American "country gentleman" and his family. Located on the *Pennsylvania Trail of History*, about a mile west of U. S. 611 on County Line Road near Horsham, Montgomery County, Graeme Park provides the modern visitor an unusual glimpse at the ingenuity of colonial Pennsylvanians.

Unlike that of many colonial homes, the early history of Graeme Park is relatively well documented. What occurred there in the nineteenth century, however, has left archeologists and historians puzzled.

The buildings were erected by Provincial Governor William Keith in 1721-22. Keith called the property "Fountain Low," and did not intend originally to use the property as his residence. His object was the manufacture of alcoholic beverages. The site contained a small distilling complex, a large building probably used as a malt house, and a "Long House" to accommodate the workmen. Letters written to his friends indicate that liquor was distilled there, and that Governor Keith delighted in sending samples of his product to his friends.

Keith's concern for the elected assembly and its constituents brought him into direct conflict with the Penn family, which had appointed him governor. After the Penns removed him from office in 1726, Keith did live at Fountain Low, probably in the "Long House," before returning to England in 1728.

Dr. Thomas Graeme, who had married Sir William's stepdaughter, purchased the Fountain Low property in 1739. What had served Keith as an industrial enterprise suited Graeme better as a country estate. As a respected Philadelphia physician, judge of the Supreme Court, port physician, and a surgeon at the Pennsylvania Hospital, Graeme wanted a residence for summer entertainment in which his social eminence could



Old Print Showing House

From Elizabeth Ferguson the property passed to Dr. William Smith, her nephew by marriage. He divided the estate into lots and sold them separately. In 1920, the land on which the main house stood was acquired by Mr. and Mrs. Welsh Strawbridge, who gave it to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1958. Although it was assumed that no one had lived in the house since about 1810, recent archeological excavations have uncovered Victorian fragments. Fossilized layers in the fireplace indicate four different floor levels. Fascinating as the stories of the known inhabitants of Graeme Park are, it is possible that the unknown tenants would prove just as interesting if the mystery of their identities could ever be solved.



Sir William Keith

from which she recovered only after immersing herself in her work for a long period of time. Her marriage to Henry Hugh Ferguson also brought her unhappiness. During the American Revolution, Ferguson became commissary of prisoners for the British in Philadelphia. Even though Graeme Park served as headquarters for Anthony Wayne in the autumn of 1777, and linen woven by her own hands was sent to the American prisoners, Elizabeth Ferguson was under suspicion of treason. In 1778, Graeme Park was seized by the colonial government as property belonging to the traitor Hugh Ferguson, and it was not until 1781 that Elizabeth succeeded in establishing her right to the estate. After the war ended, Ferguson returned to England and Elizabeth never saw him again. Legend has it that her ghostly figure can still be seen walking the estate—and that at times two figures may be seen reflected by the moonlight in the pond.



be reflected. The unusual exterior of the malt house could not be easily changed: its Swedish gambrel roof and its asymmetric windows reflected its industrial origins, as did its lack of a picturesque view. The interior could be modified for Graeme's purposes, however, and its mature Georgian features testify to this modification. The fine paneling extending from floor to ceiling, and the dining room fireplace adorned with imported English marble give evidence of Graeme Park's elegance. The letters of the many influential people who were entertained there confirm this impression. Dr. Graeme's daughter Elizabeth, a poetess and literary figure, served as her father's hostess after her mother's death, and under her supervision a noted circle of professional and political figures frequently visited Graeme Park.

Despite the circles in which Elizabeth Graeme moved, she became a tragic and controversial figure. It is said that she had an unhappy romance with Benjamin Franklin's son William,

Visiting Hours

DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME: 8:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.
weekdays except Monday; 1:00 to 5:00 P.M.
Sunday.

WINTER: 9:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. weekdays except Monday; 1:00 to 4:30 P.M. Sunday.

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